

(S) Fish and Game – SB 245 – Sen. Doug Kary – Feb. 10, 2015

Montana Outfitters and Guides Association – Jean Johnson

SB 245 seeks to do two things: foster better relationships between landowners and sportsmen by providing opportunities to hunt cow elk on private land; and to protect the habitat that sustains our wildlife populations.

You'll hear opposition to the late season hunts based, in part, on the term "sustainable population numbers," as though extending the hunting season in limited areas threatens elk numbers. SB 245 reaffirms the 2003 law that ties sustainability of wildlife populations to available habitat. SB 245 is bound to statutes that require a calculation of available habitat and a management of wildlife to support habitat enhancement. And when elk numbers exceed the "carrying capacity," it's just sound management to offer late hunts in those areas that meet the requirements of such hunts.

SB 245, page 1, line 25 says late season hunts "MAY" be conducted. The only mandate here is to manage to wildlife and habitat sustainability.

You may also hear complaints that cow hunting is somehow playing "clean up" while landowners get to commercialize the wildlife they harbor on their private acreage. That's not a universal notion among Montana hunters and even some nonresident hunters. Meat hunters are important, too.

Years ago, when the late season hunts were removed, MOGA protested on the basis that the Commission was unnecessarily removing hunting opportunity in the face of sustainable biological surplus. Perhaps the action was actually a means to enhance public access to private land – that when the elk numbers over ran the agricultural use of the land, those landowners would simply "open up" to allow the public to hunt, at least some portion of the season.

That assumption has proven to be false as there is likely a decline in access as a result of this action today as there was six years ago. Certainly, the acreage in Block Management points to a similar finding.

If SB 245 does nothing more that provide an opportunity for a meat hunter to interact with a landowner in a positive sharing way, it will be very, very successful. So much of what happens in the field – or doesn't happen – comes down to relationships.

Please support SB 245. Thank you.